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Thesis/Project

A PEARL IN THE MUD: RITUAL AND ANTI-COSMIC DUALISM IN THE *GOSPEL OF*  
*PHILIP*

BY

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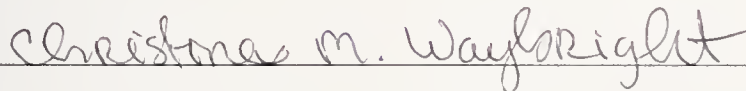
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This thesis is dedicated to my housemates at 10 Saint John's Road – Sarah, Christy, Ester, TJ,  
Susan and Cindy: brilliant scholars, trusted friends, bright lights.



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## Introduction

The *Gospel of Philip* is written in a style unlike that of the canonical gospels in part insofar as there is no discernable narrative thread that runs through it. There are no stories about the life of Jesus *per se* and there seems to be no intent to craft a coherent treatment of any one particular subject. It is different from the *Gospel of Thomas* in that the text does not focus on any sayings of Jesus. *Philip* reads much like a notebook, incorporating various ideas of interest to the author/compiler. “The *Gospel of Philip*,” writes Madaleine Scopello, “may be defined as a collection of sayings and meditations belonging to different genres – ‘parables, paraenesis, narrative dialogue, canonical sayings, aphorism and analogy’ – that have not been organized in a logical fashion.”<sup>1</sup> In short, it is a gospel unlike those with which we modern observers are familiar. It is understood by scholars to have discursive affinities with Valentinian Christianity,<sup>2</sup> an early branch of gnosticism whose founder, Valentinus, is thought to have been, during the early part of the first century, a high-ranking (orthodox) Christian teacher and leader in Rome.<sup>3</sup> The *Gospel of Philip* is likely to have been written in the latter half of the second century, or possibly in the third.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, it contains explicit references to rituals, which are understood by modern scholars to be physical, earthly rituals, and this aspect of the text is specifically relevant to this paper.

Before laying out the problem that I wish to present in this paper, that is the presence of ritual in the text, we must first discuss what one might call a typical gnostic worldview as evident in the textual discourse. Birger Pearson argues that at the center of this gnostic worldview is the attempt to explain the presence of evil, a common problem in theology. Gnostic groups tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Scopello, “The Gospel of Philip” in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*. Ed. Marvin Meyer. (New York : Harper One, 2007), 158.

<sup>2</sup> Scopello, 158.

<sup>3</sup> Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*. (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2007), 146.

<sup>4</sup> Scopello, 160.





approach this problem by positing that an omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent God could not have created the present world, with all of its evil and suffering. This world must have been created, they reason, by some sort of lesser deity, unwilling or unable to create a world without these negative aspects.<sup>5</sup> For gnostics, argues Pearson, “this world creator cannot be the same as the all-perfect transcendent God who exists above and beyond a created order that is marred by imperfection and evil.”<sup>6</sup> The present world is inherently evil as a result of its creation by this lesser deity.<sup>7</sup>

The lesser deity tends in gnostic literature to be the offspring of Sophia, who spawned this creature. The myth of the creation of this being is complex and beyond the scope of the present study, but it will serve the purposes of this paper to simply note that the world was created as the result of a mistake. Sophia, in her attempt to know the ineffable God, spawned the Demiurge on her own. The Demiurge’s nature as a demonic being comes as a result of Sophia’s selfish act. Thus, as far as *Philip’s* worldview is concerned, there exist three realms: that of the transcendent God, that of the Demiurge and his archons, and that of the present world. The present world, as we have noted, was formed by an essentially evil, and in any case ignorant deity.

As we will see, however, scholars tend to agree that the *Gospel of Philip* also promotes a type of religious observance that includes physical rituals. I can frame this problem by appealing to gnostic scholar Einar Thomassen, who in his lengthy work on the Valentinian tradition devotes some time to an analysis of the *Excerpts from Theodotus*, a rather fragmented document comprised of various passages allegedly written by the Valentinian teacher Theodotus, perhaps

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<sup>5</sup> Pearson, 106.

<sup>6</sup> Pearson, 106.

<sup>7</sup> Pearson, 106.



in the second century and recorded by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>8</sup> In his analysis of the use of ritual language – such as that of baptism – in the text, he notes that the intent of the text is not to lay out a systematic description of the ritual of the Valentinian community; the text gives some indication of the rituals as they were practiced by the community, but it is neither an exhaustive theological treatise on the liturgy nor a practical guide for how the rituals should be carried out. Rather, its chief goal is to craft an argument as to how physical rituals can be necessary – and salvific – within a discourse (Valentinian, and more broadly gnostic) in which the current existence, physical matter itself, is thought to be fallen and evil. Thomassen writes:

The account of ritual features given by *Exc.* is thus governed by the concern to explain and justify why material substances and physical acts are being used in it, a question which may be assumed to have arisen naturally from considerations about the fact that the very purpose of the ritual was to liberate the soul from the material.<sup>9</sup>

This astute observation effectively characterizes the question that has guided the writing of this paper. This paper will analyze documents – primarily the *Gospel of Philip* – that are textual components of a discursive framework in which the material world is considered to be fallen and evil, the creation of the archons, ignorant and malicious beings who inhabit the middle realm, divorced from the transcendent God. If one believes that the material world is inherently evil, how can physical rituals, the use of water in baptism, olive oil in anointing, bread and wine in the Eucharist and so on, be said to be efficacious in anything, let alone salvation?

The *Gospel of Philip* presumes the existence of five rituals: “The master did everything in a mystery: baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and bridal chamber” (67:27-30).<sup>10</sup> Scholars are convinced (April DeConick, Elaine Pagels, Eric Segelberg, all discussed below) that

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<sup>8</sup> Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’*. (Boston: Brill, 2006), 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>10</sup> Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*. (New York : Harper One, 2007), 173.



these texts are referring to physical rituals, although there is some disagreement as to whether each of the rituals is physical or whether some are carried out during ecstatic visions. Thus this paper will not be concerned with arguing *that* rituals existed in Valentinian communities, but will start with that assumption and ask *why* they existed, with specific attention paid to how the *Gospel of Philip* theologically justifies the use of ritual in the community. That is, we will be concerned with how ritual can be said to be effective and in what way; this paper will show that Valentinian theology does allow for the existence of ritual despite assuming (as Section II will show) a dualism that is at least moderately anti-cosmic.

This paper is broken into three parts. In Section I, I analyze the discursive culture of gnosticism in general, Valentinianism more specifically, and the *Gospel of Philip* in particular, in an attempt to establish that there is dualism inherent in the *Gospel of Philip* and that this dualism figures the earth as inherently evil and in some ways cut off from the divine realm of the transcendent God. I will analyze the work of, for example, Kurt Rudolph, who argues that the supposed anti-ritualism of gnostic texts - which is evident, he claims, in the fact that baptism is not thought to be salvific - is the direct result of this anti-cosmic outlook. I will bring authors like John Glyndwr Harris into the discussion, who argues that dualism is typical of Valentinian thought specifically. While keeping in mind Karen King's caution not to assume that all gnostic texts are dualistic and anti-cosmic, I will argue that this is nevertheless the case with respect to the *Gospel of Philip*. Through a discussion of key passages, I will show that the *Gospel of Philip* (1) displays a dualistic worldview and (2) that this dualism is anti-cosmic. It must be stipulated that although there is an anti-cosmic dualism in the text, the division between earthly and heavenly is not impenetrable. There are instances in which these divisions are bridged. The





instances of transcendence are the linchpin of my argument as to how ritual is justified by the text.

In Section II, I turn to a survey of various possible solutions to the problem of ritual in the *Gospel of Philip*. I discuss April DeConick's work on sacraments in the text which suggests that we must read the *Gospel of Philip* with the understanding that ritual constitutes a point of intersection between the human and the divine, and that a ritualized communion with God by virtue of the Holy Spirit consecrates acts, bodies and objects that would otherwise be evil. I turn also to Elaine Pagels, who argues that for *Philip*, rituals are not only present, they are the single most important means of coming to be saved, which from a Valentinian perspective, means the acquisition of *gnosis*. *Gnosis* is communicated, for Pagels, most effectively not through discursive means (i.e. through verbal teaching or from a text like the *Gospel of Philip* itself) but rather through rituals, which, as far as Pagels is concerned, actually *convey* knowledge of God and oneself. I also briefly discuss Henry A. Green's work, which emphasizes a sociological explanation for the ritual.

Finally, in Section III, I discuss the deifying effect that rituals have for the Valentinian group that produced this text. I will show that there are different loci of the intersection between the earthly and the divine; the human person is one such intersection and ritual is another. By invoking the power of the Holy Spirit, binding oneself to the body of the perfect person, Christ, one is able to avoid capture by malevolent archons on the ascent to the heavenly realm and attain an acquaintance with God – salvation. I argue that in order to properly understand Valentinian ritual in its proper soteriological context, that we must analyze it in terms of the way in which it is (1) “aeonically-” or eschatologically-focused; and (2) driven by the sanctification of the Spirit.



I will conclude that the theological justification for the presence of ritual in the *Gospel of Philip* is in fact *pneumatological*. That is to say, I will argue that the Trinitarian theological framework expressed by *Philip* allows for the deification, the sanctification, of certain acts, objects (such as the bread and wine at Eucharist), and people despite their present existence in this world, and that this is done by virtue of an invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit confounds the malicious plans of the archons, redeeming their sinful creation in certain instances (while in certain places the text evinces a sort of universalism, implying that all creation will at some point be saved), and coming into communion with *pneumatic* (i.e. Valentinian) Christians for example during sexual intercourse, which, as we will see, may be an aspect of the ritual known as the “bridal chamber.” This research is important because it adds nuance to our understanding of material/spiritual dualism in general and Valentinianism in particular. I seek to write against the notion that gnostics had no notion that material things could be sacred.

#### Part I: Dualism in Gnosticism, Valentinianism and the *Gospel of Philip*

The relationship between the spiritual world and the material world, good and evil and the spiritual, psychic (emotional) and fleshly aspects of the human being are the subject of considerable debate among scholars who study gnosticism in general and Valentinianism in particular. In what follows, I will provide a survey of the scholarship on the question of the so-called “dualities” that are said by some to be characteristic of these heretical Christian groups and will conclude with an analysis of some of passages in the *Gospel of Philip* which might shed light on the perspective that this text has with regard to this question.

Concerning Christian gnosticism in a general sense (although the category of “gnostic” may prove to be dubious and counterproductive, as Karen King argues, and to which subject we





will return later) the typical scholarly approach is to cite a supposedly common and typical gnostic protology/cosmology and use this as evidence that one of the hallmark tenets of gnosticism is a hatred of the material world. “Indeed,” writes Birger Pearson, “in most Gnostic systems the relationship between the higher and lower realms is expressed in terms of a tragic split in the divine world that results in the genesis of the lower beings responsible for the cosmos.”<sup>11</sup> Typically, he writes, gnostic texts tend to differentiate between the transcendent all-powerful deity and a lesser god, the one responsible for the creation of the material world,<sup>12</sup> which is, as a result, in a state of fallenness.

This division is likewise mapped onto the human person in typical gnostic anthropology. Pearson continues: “[t]he inner human self is regarded as an immaterial divine spark imprisoned in a material body. The human body and the lower emotive soul belong to this world, whereas the higher self (the mind or spirit) is consubstantial with the transcendent God from which it originated.”<sup>13</sup> And thus we have a tripartite division of human identity: the spiritual identity (capable of returning to its origins with the transcendent God), the psychic identity (the location of emotion and passion), and the flesh or hylic identity, the latter two of which will be shed by those returning to the heavenly realm. Pearson characterizes this as evidence of gnostic dualism despite its tripartite scheme, which would seem to be an inconsistency, however the essential framework of a separation between the spiritual aspect of human identity and all others is of primary relevance to this paper.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pearson, 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Kurt Rudolph argues that gnosticism is typically and essentially “anti-cosmic,” and that this attitude sets gnosticism apart from both Zoroastrian dualism (which he argues to be primarily the ethical dualism of “good versus evil” and that “evil” for Zoroastrians is not coterminous with “material”) and Platonism (which, although it holds the material world to be of lesser value, is nevertheless a good creation).<sup>15</sup> “The identification of ‘evil’ with ‘matter’,” Rudolph writes, “which is not to be found in Iranian and Zoroastrian thought, occurs in Gnosis as a *fundamental conception* [emphasis mine].”<sup>16</sup> While this may characterize certain gnostic texts, I will argue that it is an overstatement, at least in the absolutist terms in which Rudolph states it, and in any event is subject to revision that is receptive to nuance and ambiguity, at least as far as Valentinianism is concerned. Interestingly, Rudolph associates this anti-material ideology directly with an anti-ritualism which he claims is typical of gnostic groups:

In its very conception of the world it is really anti-cultic: All ‘hylic’ (material) institutions are disqualified and regarded as futile for redemption. Strictly speaking this is true also of the cultic domain. Sacraments like baptism and last supper (eucharist) cannot effect salvation and therefore do not possess those qualities that are ‘necessary for salvation’; at most they confirm and strengthen the state of grace that the gnostics (pneumatics) enjoy already, insofar as they are retained.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the anti-materialism, for Rudolph, feeds directly into anti-ritualism that is supposedly typical of some gnostics. Because the material world is fallen, the result of a lesser creator God and not the transcendent God, the manipulation of materials, such as the bread and wine during the Eucharist, or the use of rivers or jugs of water for baptismal rituals, the use of oil for extreme unction and anointing and so on, cannot have a positive effect on the relationship between the believer and the transcendent God; they cannot lead to salvation. This is particularly

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<sup>15</sup> Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987). P. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.



characteristic, he argues, of Valentinianism, which he characterizes as taking a “radical” stand against ritual.<sup>18</sup>

John Glyndwr Harris argues that this dualism extends as well to Valentinian gnosticism, whose soteriology clearly displays this. It was merely the psychic and hylic aspects of Jesus who suffered on the cross. The spiritual Christ was spared and reunited with the ineffable transcendent God; it was after the crucifixion that Christ was able to effect salvation “[b]ut in order to do this, the carnal or non-spiritual had to perish whereas the purely spiritual (the *pneumatic*) was incorporated within the *pleroma*. Christ united with the Holy Spirit is the *archetype* of the Father and the vehicle of salvation.”<sup>19</sup> And thus for Valentinians in general, this dualism extends to Christ in a form of docetism: Christ only appeared to become human and to suffer. His dual nature was such that his spiritual identity separated from his lower identities such that it was Jesus only in these lower identities who suffered and Christ only in his spiritual identity who saves Christians.

Karen King argues that while there may be a tendency toward dualism (a nebulous term in itself)<sup>20</sup> in various gnostic texts, the texts should not automatically be assumed to evince an anti-cosmic attitude.<sup>21</sup> King argues that “[c]ontrary examples of almost every supposedly essential element of Gnosticism abound”<sup>22</sup> and cites various gnostic texts as evidence that the characterization of gnosticism as anti-cosmic is a broad generalization with various exemplars that contradict the rule. She argues, for example, that the *Gospel of Truth*, a Valentinian text

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> John Glyndwr Harris, *Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices* (Portland, OR : Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 130-140.

<sup>20</sup> Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 192.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.





thought to be written by Valentinus himself,<sup>23</sup> perhaps a sermon given on the occasion of an initiation rite.<sup>24</sup> First, she argues, it does not express the “standard” protological myth that accounts for alleged anti-cosmic dualism in gnostic groups: “it draws no distinction between the true God and the creator, for the Father of Truth is the source of all that exists.”<sup>25</sup> And thus the *Gospel of Truth* does not assume the mythology that holds that the world is the creation of a lesser deity, and to the contrary holds that the Creator is in fact the benevolent, omniscient God of orthodox belief. Therefore if the author were to hold that the world is indeed fallen and evil, it would not be the result of its creation by a lesser deity.

The absence of dualism extends to Christ, drawing into question Harris’ general statement that Valentinianism argues for a docetic Jesus Christ: “The Christology is not docetic; Jesus appears as a historical figure who taught, suffered, and died.”<sup>26</sup> Having thus called into question the assumptions made by a variety of scholars who have attempted to create an outline of essential gnostic tenets, it is necessary to look to the text under consideration and to determine whether it displays dualistic tendencies. In our discussion of the *Gospel of Philip*, we will be looking for dualism both with regard to the aspects of the human person and with regard to the status of the cosmos in general. Moreover, as Karen King suggests, we will need to determine not only whether such dualism exists but also whether such dualism implies an anti-cosmic/anti-body worldview.

There is no doubt that several passages in the *Gospel of Philip* display dualistic thinking. Consider the following passage which uses metaphorical language to express a dualism between

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> On *GosTruth* as an initiation rite homily, see, e.g., Eric Segelberg, “Evangelium Veritatis: A Confirmation Homily and Its Relation to the Odes of Solomon” in *Orientalia Suecana*, Erik Gren, ed. Vol. 8(1959). Pp. 3-42.

<sup>25</sup> King, 192.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*





the spiritual aspect of the human being and the fleshly aspect: “Glass and ceramic vessels are both made with fire. If glass vessels break, they are redone, since they have been made through breath [ΠΝΕΥΜΑ]. But if ceramic vessels break, they are destroyed, since they are made without breath [ΝΙΦΕ].”<sup>27</sup> What is interesting here is that the author makes use of two different words for breath. The first is *pneuma*, a Greco-Coptic word which can mean either breath or spirit. In the second case, the author makes use of a Coptic word, *nife*, that Richard Smith defines as blow, breathe, or breath,<sup>28</sup> but which does not appear to have the dual meaning that the word *pneuma* has. One could make the plausible argument that the author is attempting to show the fundamental deadness of that which is created without *pneuma*, spirit. The spiritual aspect of the human identity will at some point be reunited with the transcendent God; the rest is left behind. Thus we have this metaphor, with glass vessels having been made through ΠΝΕΥΜΑ, a double entendre referring to the process of glass-blowing and making reference to a spiritual aspect of humans. Ceramic vessels, in contrast, are created with the manipulation of the hands, and the author does not make use of the double meaning of ΠΝΕΥΜΑ and thus the ceramic vessels are meant to symbolize the lower aspects of the identity of created things, the *psychic* and *hylic* aspects. These aspects are destroyed, or perhaps left behind when the *pneumatic* aspect of the human is reunited with God.

Yet another aspect of the *Gospel of Philip* that indicates a dualistic worldview is its apparent assertion that words, a product of this world, are an obstacle to true knowledge of God; they confound those who search for the truth. “The names of worldly things are utterly

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<sup>27</sup> *Gospel of Philip*, 63:5-11 in Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*. (New York: Harper One, 2007), p. 170. Coptic text from <http://www.metalog.org/files/till/w-till-11.gif>, accessed 2/13/11. See also [http://www.metalog.org/files/ph\\_interlin.html](http://www.metalog.org/files/ph_interlin.html).

<sup>28</sup> Richard Smith, *A Concise Coptic-English Lexicon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Atlanta : Society of Biblical Literature, 1983), 20.



deceptive, for they turn the heart from what is real to what is unreal. Whoever hears the word ‘god’ thinks not of what is real but rather of what is unreal.”<sup>29</sup> This is to say, the words do not bring the gnostic closer to God, who is real; words are merely able to refer to that which is unreal – material existence. This may imply that words uttered by humans that purport to point toward God are merely metaphorical and are in any case paltry and feeble attempts to truly know God. “So also,” Philip continues,

with the words ‘father,’ ‘son,’ ‘holy spirit,’ ‘life,’ ‘light,’ ‘resurrection,’ ‘church,’ and all the rest, people do not think of what is real but of what is unreal, [though] the words refer to what is real. The words [that are] heard belong to this world. [Do not be] deceived. If words belong to the eternal realm, they would never be pronounced in this world, nor would they designate worldly things. They would refer to what is in the eternal realm.<sup>30</sup>

The author is trying to convey the idea that words are human constructions, products of the cosmic realm and as such do not convey unadulterated truth. The author does not argue that any words uttered are utterly false or that they lead away from gnosis; after all, “the words refer to what is real.” This presents a problem on many fronts. I would like to note, first, that it should not be assumed that any author creates a theoretical framework that is fully coherent, that contains no contradictions and no ambiguities. The aim of this paper is not to reconcile one passage with another such that coherence is demonstrated. With this in mind, it is important to note the logical problems that this creates. First, how is knowledge conveyed if not through words? Certainly there are countless references to ecstatic experiences. Sethian texts frequently feature these types of visions and they would not require that words be spoken. Nevertheless, why should the *Gospel of Philip* be written if words do not contribute to knowledge about God, if they are merely of this world and thus refer to what is unreal, what is the purpose of this text? In addition, and of specific import in this paper, of what value is a baptismal rite, or a Eucharistic

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<sup>29</sup> *Gospel of Philip*, 53:23-54:5. P. 162.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



celebration, of which words and verbal prayer are no doubt an integral part, if the words that actually refer to the eternal realm “would never be pronounced in this realm”? I will show later that despite this dualistic language, and the idea that cosmic creation is fallen, that there is nevertheless value in this world for Valentinians and their soteriological framework.

Let us consider a passage that deals with the human body: “No one would hide something valuable and precious in a valuable container, but countless sums are commonly kept in a container worth only a cent. So it is with the soul. It is something precious, and it has come to be in a worthless body.”<sup>31</sup> This passage in *Philip* takes a decidedly body-negative viewpoint and thus it would appear to coincide with Pearson’s characterization discussed earlier, that is, that the human spirit is entrapped in a fleshly husk and that the body is inherently fallen and evil. *Philip* continues to elaborate on this theme, discussing the relationship between the body and spirit as it relates to salvation: “‘Flesh [and blood will] not inherit God’s kingdom,’” he writes, in a partial quotation of 1 Cor. 15:50, “What is this flesh that will not inherit? It is what we are wearing. And what is this flesh that will inherit? It is the flesh and blood of Jesus.”<sup>32</sup> In this passage as well we see a theme of the body as something that will be shed as the believer (i.e. the gnostic) enters into the eternal realm. As R. McL. Wilson notes,<sup>33</sup> *Philip* is grappling with Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, in which Paul writes, for example, that “[w]hat is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44a).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Gospel of Philip*, 56:20-26 P. 165.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 56:26-57:22. P. 165.

<sup>33</sup> R. McL. Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* (New York : A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1962), 88.

<sup>34</sup> All Scriptural references are from May & Metzger, eds. *The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, exp. ed., RSV (New York : Oxford University Press, 1977).





Wilson argues,<sup>35</sup> however, that this seems to conflict with another passage in *Philip* which seems to take a more neutral position toward the condition of the flesh. “Do not fear the flesh and do not love it. If you fear the flesh, it will dominate you. If you love the flesh, it will swallow you up and strangle you” (66). I would argue, contrary to Wilson, that there is no conflict in *Philip*’s assertion that on the one hand, the flesh is evil and that the spiritual aspect of the human is to be resurrected. Instead, I would argue that this passage fits into a general theme of self-discipline and is part of a general exhortation to good works which we see in *Philip* on occasion. “How can we give help to everyone?” asks the author, to which the author provides the answer:

The person who does good deeds will not help the rich, for this person will not take just anything that may be desirable. Nor can such a person cause them grief, since this person does not give them trouble. The new rich sometimes cause others grief, but the person who does good deeds does not do this. It is the wickedness of these people that causes their grief. The person with the nature of a perfect human gives joy to the good, but some people are deeply distressed by all this” (79:32-80:23).<sup>36</sup>

Apart from a possible allusion to Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 or his Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, this passage is a call for members of the Valentinian sect to eschew worldly goods and to do good only to the poor and righteous. Thus I would argue that *Philip*’s exhortation to his readers not to become preoccupied with the flesh but neither to be afraid of it is actually a moderately ascetic viewpoint. It does not seek to fully divorce the community from the world (they are meant to engage with it in certain capacities) and likewise it discourages any preoccupation with that which is of the flesh, of the material world. It is important to note that this passage does not speak against an overall dualism and it does not imply that the cosmic

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<sup>35</sup> Wilson, 88.

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, 182-83.





realm is anything other than fallen and evil. It merely implies that there are ways of acting in the world that are positive and desirable. Works are not meaningless.

The fact that good works have some value for Valentinians despite an overall dualism and despite the fact that this dualism implies a negative view of the cosmic world is a point which might bear fruit in terms of our attempt to explain the presence of ritual in these groups. We will return to this topic later, but a brief discussion will suffice in order to elucidate the problem. In his discussion of the role of sin in Valentinianism, Michel Desjardins discusses baptism as it is recorded in *The Apostolic Tradition*, which he argues “can serve as a rough tool for gauging what occurred in Valentinian communities.”<sup>37</sup> Desjardins gives a brief outline of the baptismal service and its outcome: “The initiation process described in this work is long and complicated. It begins with the candidate’s decision to become a Christian and usually ends three years later with an elaborate baptism ceremony, immediately followed by a eucharist and the convert’s proclamation that he or she will go forth in the world to do good works.”<sup>38</sup> And thus we see that despite the – perhaps mild, but prevalent – anti-cosmic attitude of works like the *Gospel of Philip*, Valentinian groups nevertheless have a perspective on and a presence in the created world. They are not merely ascetics who spend their time meditating, contemplating the divine and experiencing the divine. Those elements may be present; salvation comes from *gnosis*, a spiritual acquaintance with God, but there is a place for action in the world. Thus as we see in Desjardins, one of the outcomes of baptism is an expectation and promise to do good works.

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<sup>37</sup> Michel R. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta : Scholars Press, 1990), 129.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 129



**Carnal to Holy: DeConick and the Sanctification of Sex in *Philip***

The *Gospel of Philip* acknowledges the existence of five sacraments, although there are significant doubts as to whether these can be counted as fully separate rites or as components of a single service.<sup>39</sup> We read in 67:27-30: “The Lord [did] everything in a mystery [or sacrament, **MYCTHPION**]: baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and bridal chamber.”<sup>40</sup> And thus our task is to determine how these ritual actions are justified in light of our argument that there is in fact dualistic anti-cosmic language in the text. April DeConick argues that as we approach the issue of ritual in the *Gospel of Philip*, our investigation would profit from a broadening of our understanding of the meaning of ritual, at least within the context of this specific text. She argues that we might understand the *mysterion* that *Philip* is mentioning to mean more than merely a sacrament in a public ritual setting. It certainly does refer to this type of public, physical ritual, but she argues that it also refers to “manners of thinking sacrally, mundane activities infused with sacrosanct meaning, as well as ritual performances.”<sup>41</sup> She founds this assertion, ironically, on the dualism inherent in the concept of a sacrament: “[t]he distinctive feature of a sacrament is that it is at once both ‘visible and invisible.’”<sup>42</sup> This is to say, with the performance of a sacrament, the gap, so to speak, between the earthly and divine is bridged; it is “an experience in which the human does not participate alone, but where he acts in communion with God[.] In a ‘sacrament,’ the human participates in a higher reality, the reality of the Spirit

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<sup>39</sup> On the interdependence of the five sacraments in *Philip*, see, e.g. Turner, John D. “Ritual in Gnosticism” in *SBL 1994 Book of Seminar Papers*, pp. 136-181. [jdt.unl.edu/ritual.htm](http://jdt.unl.edu/ritual.htm) accessed 2/5/11.

<sup>40</sup> I have used the Meyer translation for this passage, p. 173, but have altered his translation of the Coptic word **ΠΛΟΕΙC** to read “Lord” instead of “Master.” According to Richard Smith (p. 55) the word can have either meaning.

<sup>41</sup> DeConick, April. “The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the ‘Gospel of Philip’ in *Vigilae Christianae*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2001), pp. 225-261. P. 230.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*



without ever ceasing to be human.”<sup>43</sup> DeConick is thus arguing that there are various actions (and thoughts) which would attempt to bridge the gap between the present world and the heavenly; in this sense, then, *Philip* may use the word *mysterion* to refer to “sacraments” that are performed in contexts other than in set public rituals.<sup>44</sup> Given that our present study is concerned with explaining the presence of physical ritual in an apparently anti-cosmic context, we need not limit the discussion of DeConick’s theory merely to those sacraments performed as part of a formal religious service, although we will limit the discussion to those sacraments that have a physical component.

DeConick’s paper is mainly concerning with showing that the ritual language in the *Gospel of Philip* is similar to a Jewish mystical tradition that arose after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. Jewish mystics, she writes, transferred the Temple-based liturgical tradition into spiritual rites. “The priestly ritual,” she writes, “was understood to be performed by the angels in the heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>45</sup> There is a similar phenomenon at play in the *Gospel of Philip*: “just as the Jewish mystics invented a surrogate supernal Temple of seven shrines through which they could ascend to the Presence of God and perform their liturgical duties, the *Gospel of Philip* preserves a similar celestial Temple tradition. Its three heavenly Temple shrines represent the esoteric reality behind the sacraments.”<sup>46</sup> The focus of her work is therefore primarily on this esoteric, ecstatic experience of the divine ritual and this is not my focus. Nevertheless, she offers several important insights. First, she argues that physical rituals have dual efficacy: they perform work in this realm and in the heavenly realm simultaneously. Second, and similarly, through these rituals, the *pneumatic* Valentinians are able to use the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.





occasion of the earthly ritual as the point at which the divine spirit of God is channeled, so to speak. In so doing, they are able to sanctify or redeem the body or the physical act in which they are engaged. This point is crucial to my thesis: despite the fallenness of creation, there are nevertheless what one might call discrete points of intersection of the material and the divine. There are, as DeConick argues compellingly, instances of sanctification of bodies, objects and actions.

The first point, that physical rituals have dual efficacy, is borne out in Valentinian initiation rituals discussed in *Philip*, rituals which have a bipartite structure: they involve baptism by water and fire, with the water of course referring to ritual immersion and the fire referring to the chrism, anointed afterward. DeConick draws our attention to 57:22-28 which appears to show this dual efficacy clearly: “By water and fire this whole realm is purified, the visible by the visible, the hidden by the hidden. Some things are hidden by the visible. There is water within water, there is fire within the oil of anointing.”<sup>47</sup> She interprets this text: “baptism by water and fire operate on two levels, purifying the ‘visible’ or physical aspect and the ‘hidden’ or spiritual aspect.”<sup>48</sup> In accounting for change both in the cosmic dimension and the heavenly, the Valentinian is able to perceive the true depth of the sacrament; more than that, the *pneumatic* Christian is the recipient of a more comprehensive divine act of salvation – the sacrament is redemptive for *pneumatic* Valentinians. Initiatory rituals induce visionary experiences. In 69:4-14 we have a reference to the bipartite initiatory ritual: “We are born again through the Holy Spirit, and we are conceived through Christ in baptism with two elements. We are anointed through the Spirit, and when we were conceived, we were united.”<sup>49</sup> DeConick

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<sup>47</sup> Meyer, 166.

<sup>48</sup> DeConick, 231.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, 175.



argues that this is evidence “that through baptism and chrism the initiate is not only begotten by the Holy Spirit and Christ, but he is joined (ζωτῶν) to them.”<sup>50</sup> This spiritual union is the exclusive privilege of *pneumatics*.

The redemption or sanctification of the body is an important part of *Philip*’s ritual theology, and we see this particularly in Eucharist and in what DeConick claims are sexual relationships between married persons which are imbued with sacramental meaning – the mysterious Bridal Chamber. *Philip*’s Eucharistic theology shares much in common with that of the Eastern Orthodox tradition in that it focuses on the *divinization* of the person partaking of the bread and wine, rather than on the atoning sacrifice of the Roman tradition.<sup>51</sup> Consecrated bread and wine brings the person who receives it closer to God by consecrating her or his body. In contrast to the initiatory rituals, which have a this-world function of consecrating the initiate and facilitating heavenly visions in the *present time*, the Eucharist has the function of transforming the eschatological body that it might be cloaked, so to speak, so that during the ascent into the heavenly realm the body will be rendered invisible to archons who would capture it in their lower realm.<sup>52</sup> The Eucharist draws the Valentinian Christian nearer to the body of Christ, whose “own movement through the heavens was undetectable to the archons who populate the realms.”<sup>53</sup>

The ritual must be performed in the current age, not during the eschaton, as we read at the end of *Philip*, “If one does not receive it while here in this place, one cannot receive it in the

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<sup>50</sup> DeConick, 238.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



other place.”<sup>54</sup> By taking in the body and blood of Christ into one’s own body, one prepares for the ascent to the transcendent God: “to receive the resurrected body, the Perfect Man, is to have one’s own body transformed into the primordial body which can be resurrected but which will be invisible to the archons.”<sup>55</sup> For DeConick, this is the theological rationale for Valentinian Eucharist, which works in conjunction with baptism, which also constitutes a this-world ritual with an eschatological function: “Since it is necessary for the believer to ‘put on a living man’ [75:15-25], he must first descend into the waters of baptism, unclothing himself, so that he might now put on the Living Man through imbibing the eucharistic body.”<sup>56</sup> So the literal, physical act of taking off of one’s clothes during the descent into the water has a spiritual analogue, and the act of eating the bread and wine have the spiritual analogue of “putting on” the body of Christ.

It is in her discussion of the Bridal Chamber that DeConick presents an argument that is most compelling for our purposes; I will argue that the theological function of the Bridal Chamber is illustrative of Valentinian ritual theology in general and that Elaine Pagels’s work will bear this out. Just as the initiation rituals and the Eucharist operate on both planes, the Bridal Chamber has both a present cosmic reality and a spiritual one. “On one level,” she writes, “*Philip* talks about marriage as a sacrament in terms of its human institution. On another level, it is understood to be the great eschatological event, the Bridal Chamber, when the cleansed and transformed spirit finally enters the Holy of Holies, marries his angel, and is granted to see the Father face to face.”<sup>57</sup> On the earthly level, marriage – in which procreation is viewed positively – should be characterized by continence and purity of thought.<sup>58</sup> During sex, the thoughts of the

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<sup>54</sup> Meyer, 186.

<sup>55</sup> DeConick, 244.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.





couple must be on each other, not on anyone else, for as we read in 78:12-25, “[t]he children a woman brings forth resemble the man she loves. If it is her husband, they resemble her husband. If it is a lover, they resemble the lover.”<sup>59</sup> We might not take this literally; it may be a means by which we can better interpret the next passage: “So, you who live with the Son of God, do not love the world but love the master, that what you bring forth may not resemble the world, but may resemble the master.”<sup>60</sup> *Philip* is arguing “that the couple direct their thoughts to God so that the child conceived will be of the spiritual race resembling the Lord.”<sup>61</sup> She quotes 78:29-79:5, which reads in part: “Members of a species have sex with members of the same species. So also spirit has intercourse with spirit, word mingles with word, light mingles [with light]. If [you] become human, [a human] will love you. If you become [spirit], spirit will unite with you.”<sup>62</sup> And thus

[t]he proper marriage is the marriage that is based on ‘pure’ (ΤΒΒΗΥ) thought rather than mere ‘carnal’ (CΑΡΚΙΚΟΝ) activity, ‘belonging not to desire, but to the will’ (ΕΧΗΤ ΑΝ ΑΤΕΠΙΘΥΜΙΑ ΑΛΛΑ ΕΠΟΥΩΩ) (82:9). During sexual intercourse, the couple must send their will to heaven. In so doing, they will draw down the light and at the mysterious moment of conception, the light will consort with the couple.<sup>63</sup>

Thus the act of physical sexual union must be met with a certain frame of mind, a state of spiritual awareness, on the part of the couple such that the spirit of the true God will descend and sanctify the act, making it a powerful sacramental act. There is a distinction here between what *pneumatic* Christians do and what sex for pious *pneumatics* means and the valence of sex between ordinary *psychic* Christians: “If they are sexually active, even during their marriages, they are involved in impurity and sin because their minds are focused on fulfilling the pleasures

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<sup>59</sup> Meyer, 181.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> DeConick, 247.

<sup>62</sup> Meyer, 181.

<sup>63</sup> DeConick, 249.





of their bodies rather than the will of their spirits.”<sup>64</sup> Because of their knowledge of the true nature of their act, their ability to commune with the spirit which consecrates their fleshly act, it is rendered holy.

DeConick reconstructs a possible Valentinian theology of procreation: “When performed sacramentally, the spirit of the child conceived would resemble God. Being immortal, it would be drawn down from the heavens above to sojourn on earth until it returned to its spiritual origin at death. But when performed out of desire, the child would merely resemble the world and its darkness and become fodder for death.”<sup>65</sup> In general terms, then, it seems that the various sacraments, although they are performed in the flesh with matter like bread and wine, have a different valence depending on who is performing them. In fact, the nature of the matter, the status of the person and the ethical meaning of the acts themselves change depending on whether they are acted upon by *pneumatic* Christians or *psychic* Christians. The pious Valentinian is able to commune with the eternal God who consecrates the act, matter or person. The “orthodox” or normal, *psychic* Christian is unable to do this. The *psychic* Christian is completely unaware of the deeper spiritual meaning that these things have. Valentinians frame their sacraments in contrast to those of orthodox Christians in that they believed that “their sacraments possessed the mysterious power of redemption, while the same sacraments did not for ordinary Christians.”<sup>66</sup> Thus the Valentinian ritual was more effective for *pneumatic* Christians than it was for *psychic* Christians; it “effected a deeper spiritual action.”<sup>67</sup> *Pneumatic* Christians are able to sanctify the sexual act, bringing themselves into communion with God, and therefore creating a bridge between the human and the divine. The couple has thus transformed what was once merely

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>66</sup> DeConick, 259.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



carnal into something spiritual and holy. This is how I seek to explain the presence of ritual in *Philip*. Despite the inherent evil of material creation, there are loci of sanctification and the text thus holds anti-cosmic dualism and ritual together in theological tension.

#### Elaine Pagels on the Efficacy of Ritual for *Philip*

Pagels agrees with DeConick that *Philip*, along with mainstream orthodox Christians, understood baptism to effect a rebirth in the initiate. They also agree that *Philip* is concerned that “ordinary” Christians are not the recipients of a fully realized baptism. *Philip* agrees with mainstream Christians “that the holy spirit is expected to descend upon the baptismal candidate and effect regeneration,” but is also aware “that ritual performance of baptism does not always effect these anticipated transactions.”<sup>68</sup> The primary substantive difference between Pagels’ reconstruction of *Philip*’s sacramental theology and that of DeConick is that Pagels does not see as much of a clear and inherent difference between *psychics* and *pneumatics* in terms of their access to the redemption, for example, in baptism. For Pagels, *Philip* holds that the archons – inhabitants of a middle realm divorced from the true God – subvert the power of the ritual by claiming the names, the words used during the ritual, as their own, changing their meaning: “baptism, that transformer of spiritual energies, commonly understood to expel evil spirits and charge the initiate with God’s spirit, may have its circuits changed, so to speak, by invidious spiritual powers.”<sup>69</sup> While orthodox Christians would have held baptism to be the very process by which demons are expelled, Valentinians, at least those represented by *Philip*, would have been concerned that these archons were disrupting and subverting the ritual. One of the passages at issue is this: “The rulers [i.e. archons] wanted to fool people, since they saw that people have

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<sup>68</sup> Elaine Pagels, “Ritual in the Gospel of Philip,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (New York: Brill, 1997), 283.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.



a kinship with what is truly good. They took the names of the good and assigned them to what is not good, to fool people with names and link the names to what is not good” (54:18-31).<sup>70</sup> This subverts the initial intent of God, who “brought forth names in the world for us, and no one can refer to truth without names” (54:13-18).<sup>71</sup> Pagels argues that this corruption happens at the point of baptism, when “those malevolent lower powers who seized upon truth’s gift and stole the ‘names,’ intended to transform them from a means of disclosing truth into an instrument of deception.”<sup>72</sup> While orthodox Christians believe that baptism *releases* the initiate from sin, *Philip* holds that using the very same ritual, “the archons plan to use the very media of redemption in order to ‘take the free man and enslave him to themselves forever’ (54.29-31).”<sup>73</sup>

The factor that differentiates the baptism of the Valentinian from those of unwitting orthodox Christians is that Valentinians properly understand the Scriptural-mythological acts of Christ, namely his birth and resurrection, which serve as the cipher by which they properly interpret baptism.<sup>74</sup> *Philip* is opposed to those Christians who would treat the incarnation as a singular event; he is opposed to “those who believe that Jesus’ birth was an event that derived its significance from its uniqueness.”<sup>75</sup> *Philip* understands the orthodox to “interpret Jesus’ birth and resurrection as if they happened only to *him* and not to *ourselves*, as well. Philip indicates that his perspective differs from that of many other Christians, who regard Jesus’ divine birth as a unique, revelatory historical event – instead of an event that becomes, as it has for Philip, a sacramental paradigm.”<sup>76</sup> It is in the spiritual identification of oneself with Christ, in terms of his Incarnation, baptism, and Resurrection that one is able to secure true redemption from these

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<sup>70</sup> Meyer, 163.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>72</sup> Pagels, 284.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Pagels, 286.





sacraments. On the one hand, the initiate identifies herself with Christ and simultaneously (as we noted with DeConick), she has “the potential to become, through sacramental transformation, a Christ (ΟΥΧΡC, 67.27).”<sup>77</sup>

Pagels takes a similar position to DeConick in arguing that it is in the relationship between the ritual participants and the physical elements of the sacraments (water, oil, bread, etc.) that the difference is made; *Philip* recognizes the same ambivalence in “types and images,” such as the physical aspect of the sacraments, as are present in words, although it is only through the physical acts of the sacraments that true *gnosis* is available.<sup>78</sup> A document might convey knowledge, one might gain *gnosis*, acquaintance with God, from a *pneumatic* teacher, but ritual is able to do more:

While ‘names’ are necessary to teach truth, Philip notes that, when implicated in deception, they may also teach error. But ‘types and images’ do much more than *words*; they do more than teach; instead they – and they alone, Philip says, – *convey* divine reality. We recall the famous passage: ‘truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images; *the world will not receive truth in any other way.*’[67:9-27] ... Unlike words, then, which only *teach about* or *symbolize* divine reality, the sacramental elements *convey* it. (Philip, one gathers, is not a low church Protestant!)<sup>79</sup>

Those Christians who are unaware of the deeper meaning, who are unable to draw themselves closer to God by virtue of their knowledge of their true identity – that they participate in the acts of Christ – do not engage in ritual whose material components have been sanctified.

Nevertheless, the Church’s sacraments are crucial to salvation: “no one, Philip warns, will receive (the perfect light) in the consummation who has not already received it here in ‘types and images’ (86.6-7), that is, apparently, in baptismal ritual.”<sup>80</sup> Far from denying the efficacy of physical rituals (there isn’t even the claim that the rituals are symbolic) *Philip* argues that ritual –

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-89.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.



properly understood – is the key to salvation. And thus it becomes clear that, for Pagels, *Philip* is adamant about the efficacy of ritual. Contrary to Rudolph, sacraments in *Philip* actually perform the act necessary for salvation. Provided that the person performing the ritual is able to see the truth behind it, they are able to perform a ritual whose material components are not, for example, infected with demons. The orthodox, for *Philip*, can make no such claim.

Henry A. Green looks at Valentinian ritual from a sociological standpoint; his work can provide insight on potential rationales for sacraments in these groups that buttress those of theology. Interestingly, and of particular importance to this paper, he argues that rituals certify a member of the group as one who has attained a certain level of spiritual awareness: “rituals emphasize socialization processes by cultivating repeated behaviour that symbolically certifies the person’s sacred level of existence, as well as his or her membership in the collectivity.”<sup>81</sup> Thus particularly for Valentinians, those who value the acquisition of a relatively esoteric knowledge as the key to salvation, ritual might be particularly important. Through the process of repetitive communal action, they make explicit to the community (and perhaps to outsiders as well) that they have indeed attained the knowledge that is so highly valued by the community. Drawing on Pagels who argues that the materials of the ritual actually *convey gnosis*, the ritual also binds the individual more closely with the group insofar as *gnosis* becomes a communally-realized event. The community comes together to create a ritual of which *gnosis* is the result.

Green argues that ritual has a specific role in ensuring group cohesion in the *Gospel of Philip* itself: “the chrism ritual confers the status of membership on the initiate and reinforces the ideology and status of old members through their participation in the ritual. The sacrament

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<sup>81</sup> Henry A. Green, “Ritual in Valentinian Gnosticism: A Sociological Interpretation” in *The Journal of Religious History*, 12, (1982) pp. 109-124. P. 119.



itself testifies to the initiate having achieved special merit and that he has exhibited and subscribed to normative patterns of behavior.”<sup>82</sup> Pagels argues that *Philip* presupposes a worldview that is less sectarian than other scholars have assumed: “Philip concludes his gospel with a vision of the time of consummation, when finally ‘the perfect light will pour out upon everyone; and all those who are in it will receive (the chrism); then the slaves will be free and the captives delivered’ (85.25-30).”<sup>83</sup> And thus ultimately, during the eschaton, all Christians will be liberated from the slavery of this world; redemption is not limited merely to *pneumatics*. Nevertheless, the ritual anointing with chrism reinforces group boundaries, giving the community a more cogent framework around which to form an identity.

Green argues that the presence of ritual – and the relative importance of ritual in Valentinian groups – is an indication that the group must have been stratified to some degree; there must have been a “hierarchical division of labour within the respective movements to convey the necessary information and to exercise social control. Each ritual would require teachers who were knowledgeable and who could prepare and administer the appropriate sacrament to those who were less than ‘perfect’.”<sup>84</sup> While there may indeed have been a hierarchy within the group, I do not think that this is a necessary requirement in order to effect the desired ritual outcome. Remembering Pagel’s work, we might argue that although the rituals themselves are necessary, there is no indication that they must be performed by priests who retained that position indefinitely. Green himself quotes Tertullian who believes that Valentinians have a process whereby roles are rotated among members of the community.<sup>85</sup> In any event, as Pagels notes, it is the sacraments themselves, the bread and wine which draw the

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>83</sup> Pagels, 291.

<sup>84</sup> Green, 121.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.





initiate closer to Christ; no definitive mention is made of who consecrates the elements, or that it is performed by someone who does it as part of an ongoing role. Moreover, if DeConick is correct that the Bridal Chamber makes reference to actions between married couples, the sacrament is performed by any couple who is able to commune with the spirit during sexual intercourse; this directly contradicts Green's argument.

And thus as we have seen, *Philip* draws a clear distinction between *Philip's* own group and its rituals and those of the orthodox. And, as Green has pointed out, we have a sociological foundation for our contention that they did in fact draw these boundaries. The distinction, then, turns on the ultimate spiritual nature of the rituals they perform. Sex between *pneumatic* Christians is a sacred act, causing the descent of the Spirit and therefore sanctification. Other rituals, as Pagels argues, are truly effectual spiritually, and the cast the Valentinians off from other Christians. They are the only Christians capable of realizing the sanctification of the formerly evil, fallen objects, actions and people.

### PART III: Using the Concept of "Sanctification" to Explain Ritual Despite Anti-Cosmic Dualism

Several authors have noted the similarity between Eastern Orthodoxy and Valentinian sacramental theology in terms of its emphasis on deification, or *theosis*. Eric Segelberg<sup>86</sup> and April DeConick<sup>87</sup> are two such examples. One of the most glaring textual references to the sanctification of the material aspects of the Eucharist – and thus of the human body that consumes it – comes in 77:2-7: "The holy person is completely holy, including the person's body. The holy person who takes up bread consecrates it, and does the same with the cup or

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<sup>86</sup> Eric Segelberg, "The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and Its Sacramental System" in *Numen*, vol. 7, fasc. 2 (Dec., 1960), pp. 189-200. P. 195-96.

<sup>87</sup> DeConick, "The True Mysteries," p. 241-42.





anything else the person takes up and consecrates. So how wouldn't the person consecrate the body also?" Meyer places this passage under the heading "The Priest," an indication, it would seem, of his claim that this refers to an ordained priest who sanctifies the body and blood of the Eucharist.

Segelberg argues that it is not clear who this "holy person" is, but that it is possibly a reference to a commonly-shared priesthood of gnostic Christians. Segelberg makes "the assumption that by the holy man is meant the man who is fully initiated, the pneumatic; he has so much of the *pneuma* that he in his turn can sanctify."<sup>88</sup> This is a rather apt exegesis of this text given some of the spirit-centered imagery invoked at other points in *Philip*, with specific reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. Segelberg quotes 75:14-25, which reads: "The cup of prayer contains wine and water, for it represents the blood for which thanksgiving is offered. It is full of the Holy Spirit, and it belongs to the completely perfect human. When we drink it, we take to ourselves the perfect human."<sup>89</sup> As far as Segelberg is concerned, for *Philip* the wine and water mixture that comprise part of the Eucharistic celebration are "full of the Holy Spirit" only insofar as they are consecrated by a *pneumatic* Christian: "The Eucharist of the Church lacks *pneuma* – it does not give life. Therefore those who have frequently communicated have nevertheless not received anything, but when the evening of life comes then they are as un-spiritual as when they began life."<sup>90</sup>

In support of Segelberg's assertion that *psychic* Christians receive bread and wine that are merely that – material things not infused with the power of the Spirit – I would cite this passage: "This world eats corpses, and everything eaten in this world also dies. Truth eats life, and no one

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<sup>88</sup> Segelberg, "Philip and Its Sacramental System," p. 196.

<sup>89</sup> Meyer, 179.

<sup>90</sup> Segelberg, "Philip and Its Sacramental System," pp. 196-197.



nourished by the [truth] will die. Jesus came from that realm and brought food from there, and he gave [life] to all who wanted it, that they might not die” (73:19-27). There seem to be Eucharistic undertones in this passage; Jesus came from the higher realm and “brought food from there” which brings everlasting life. Those who do not receive this food as food brought from the heavenly realm are merely eating something dead, “corpses.” However for *Philip* if one eats the true food, that brought by Jesus and manifested in the Last Supper of the canonical gospels, one will never die.

As noted, Segelberg argues that if one is a *pneumatic* Christian, one is able in turn to sanctify the bread and wine of the Eucharist. “If this interpretation is correct,” he argues, “we have here a kind of ‘receptionism’ so that the sanctity of the receiver sanctifies the sacrament which in turn sanctifies the receiver.”<sup>91</sup> And thus with regard to the Eucharist we have a circular process whereby the *pneumatic* Christian, the sanctified gnostic Christian, is able to sanctify the bread and wine which then sanctifies her body. The Holy Spirit is only truly invoked by the truly enlightened Christian.

It is important to realize that although distinctions are made between the present world and the earthly realm, there are points of intersection. The current world is not fully separated and cut off from God’s grace. God reveals Godself to us, that is, *pneumatic* Christians, through the Spirit:

The upper realm was opened for us in the lower realm, that we might enter the hidden realm of truth. This is what is truly worthy and mighty, and we shall enter through symbols that are weak and insignificant. They are weak compared to perfect glory. There is glory that surpasses glory, there is power that surpasses power. Perfect things have opened to us, and hidden things of truth.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.



The holy of holies was revealed, and the bedchamber invited us in" (84:20-85:21).<sup>92</sup>

Thinking Platonically, there is a sense in which material objects are shadows, glimmers of divine reality. For *Philip*, material things are necessary for true *gnosis*, and they may be, as Pagels notes, superior to discursive intellectual knowledge in that they actually convey divine knowledge. Stated in words more faithful to a gnostic outlook, the sacraments are the point at which the participant gains the acquaintance with God that is necessary for salvation. This acquaintance can only be made, however, under the appropriate pretenses: the participant must *understand* the meaning of what he or she is doing.

Everett Ferguson is alive to the tension that exists with a group whose outlook displays anti-cosmic feeling but whose theology permits and even encourages physical rituals. "The statements about what is accomplished in baptism," he writes, "and those that disparage baptism may be reconciled in the thought that spiritual realities come through images of the real thing (cf. 59; II 67, 9-27), but the latter is what is really important."<sup>93</sup> For *Philip*, the earthly sacraments are a necessary but not sufficient criterion for salvation: "Although these types and images are 'contemptible,' they convey divine reality. No one will receive the perfect light who has not already received it here through these symbols (107; II 86, 6-7)."<sup>94</sup> This particular understanding of sacraments does not differ substantively from that of the orthodox; "[t]he statements in the two systems, however, are placed in different worldviews and different plans of salvation."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Meyer, 186.

<sup>93</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 287.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 290





In analyzing the *Gospel of Philip* for its liturgical structure, it is important to understand the way in which the author holds the material and the spiritual in tension with one another. I will argue that the author does this by laying out an eschatological, spiritually-focused timeline, so to speak. By the term “eschatological,” I do not mean to convey the idea that the *Gospel of Philip* is particularly apocalyptic in its outlook; it does not speak of a cataclysmic destruction of worldly principalities and powers followed by the return of Christ as judge. I do, however, wish to claim that the text is focused on the age to come, the future reuniting of the spirit, ΠΝΕΥΜΑ, with God and that in order to understand the significance of ritual and sacrament for *Philip*, we must think of salvation in terms of this timeline, whose climax is this reunion, and which is in part facilitated by the worldly sacraments.

We begin to get a glimpse of this soteriological/eschatological framework at the beginning of the *Gospel*. We read in 52:25-35: “Whoever sows in winter reaps in summer. Winter is the world, summer is the other aeon, the eternal realm. Let’s sow in the world to reap in summer. And for this reason we should not pray in winter.”<sup>96</sup> There is a clear sense in this passage that the proper orientation of Christians is toward the future; although we are presently confined to the material world, our destiny and fulfillment is not here, but in the heavenly aeon, where we will be reunited with God. “From winter comes summer;” *Philip* continues, “If someone reaps in winter, the person will not really reap but will pull out the young plants, and such do not produce a crop. [That person’s field] is barren not only [now] but also on the Sabbath.”<sup>97</sup> Worldly benefits, wealth, material goods, the outward signs of pleasure and

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<sup>96</sup> Meyer, 162.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*



happiness are actually a curse, for if one reaps in the present world, he or she will gain nothing in the world to come. This resonates with Lk. 6:24: “But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.” Like Luke, *Philip* seeks to orient the reader toward a future salvation, although of course there is a considerable difference in the type of salvation that these two authors envisioned. Despite this soteriological timeline whose climax is in a future reunion with God, the present world is of considerable importance. We are, after all, “sowing seeds” in the present world. In order to determine the significance of the present world, we must set about the task of determining what these “seeds” might be.

There are notes in *Philip* of what we might call “universalism,” an anachronism that has a limited but illuminating application here. Although the material world is essentially fallen and evil, there is nevertheless universal redemption. “Then he [Christ] came forth to take it [the soul] back, since it had been laid down as a deposit. It had fallen into the hands of robbers and had been stolen, but he saved it. And he redeemed the good in the world and the bad” (52:35-53:14). The robbers in this passage are the archons, lesser deities in temporary control over the cosmos. By assuring the reader of salvation while nevertheless affirming that the present world is evil, the author holds good and evil in tension with one another. The author is laying bare the present separation from God (and control by archons), the present state of evil, while at the same time pointing the reader toward the coming harvest, the time when we reap what we have sown in this life. The question then becomes: In what way do sacraments and rituals sow seeds? How do they function within *Philip*’s soteriological framework?

The points of intersection of the spiritual realm with the earthly realm are crucial in understanding the place of physical rituals within *Philip*’s soteriology. With the creation of this



world comes the creation of separation, disunity, fragmentation and falsehood that will be reconciled in the future reunion with God; the world is a dim shadow of heavenly truth:

Light and darkness, life and death, and right and left are siblings of one another, and inseparable. For this reason the good are not good, the bad are not bad, life is not life, and death is not death. Each will dissolve into its original nature, but what is superior to the world cannot be dissolved, for it is eternal (53:14-23).<sup>98</sup>

The *psychic* and *hylic* aspects of creation will “dissolve” at the end of their earthly existence.

Those aspects of created things that are *pneumatic*, however, will be preserved. Thus the qualities inherent in the present world, disunity and fragmentation, are transient and illusory.

The current world nevertheless contains within it those things which are “superior to the world,” and they will not “be dissolved.”

Looking back on our analysis thus far, we have seen several places in which the immortal/spiritual and the worldly intersect. One of those foci is the human person. As we have shown, Valentinians, and gnostics more generally, tend to divide the human person into *pneumatic*, *psychic*, and *hylic* aspects, the latter two of which are mortal and will fall away at the point of reunion with God. Nevertheless during our time on earth, the human person is a point of intersection between the cosmic and the divine. The true essence of the human being, her  $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ , is intact despite being trapped in an earthly body: “If a pearl is thrown into mud, it will not lose its value, and if it is anointed with balsam, it will not increase its value. It is always precious in its owner’s eyes. Likewise, the children of God are precious in the eyes of the father, whatever their circumstances of life” (62:17-26).<sup>99</sup> Although the two lower aspects of the human being are mortal and transient, the *pneumatic* aspect of the human person will remain intact until it is reunited with God. I would argue that this is an effective metaphor for explaining the

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<sup>98</sup> Meyer, 162.

<sup>99</sup> Meyer, 169.





presence of ritual in the *Gospel of Philip* in general. Despite the generally profane nature of the material world, the “mud,” there are certain “pearls” that retain or are given a sacred aspect. Ritual is a way of creating sacred objects.

Another such intersection, as we have seen, is through sacraments. The sacrament has both a revealed, earthly element and a hidden one. The reader will remember 57:22-28: “By water and fire this whole realm is purified, the visible by the visible, the hidden by the hidden. Some things are hidden by the visible. There is water within water, there is fire within the oil of anointing.”<sup>100</sup> Also, as we have seen, the *pneumatic* (or, as Meyer suggests, a priest of the Valentinian group) is able to effect a consecrating event. Reading DeConick, we learned that during sexual intercourse between married *pneumatics*, the couple participates in an event in which they are brought into communion with the Spirit, transforming the sexual act from something carnal and thus evil into a spiritual event foreshadowing the eschatological union with one’s angelic counterpart in heaven. Likewise, recalling Segelberg, a *pneumatic* Christian is able to imbue the Eucharistic elements with the Spirit by virtue of her having received the spirit herself. In any event, as Pagels argues, receiving *gnosis* through the sacraments is far more potent and desirable than the reception of *gnosis* through discursive means (i.e. through the *Gospel of Philip*, for example): “But ‘types and images’ do much more than *teach*; instead they – and they alone, Philip says, - *convey* divine reality.”<sup>101</sup> And therefore sacramental actions – many of them ritualized events carried out before the community – are not only loci of the intersection between the spiritual and the earthly, they are the most important part of our earthly lives; they are the most potent means of sowing the seeds to be reaped in our future spiritual existence.

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<sup>100</sup> Meyer, 166.

<sup>101</sup> Pagels, 288.





Let us, then, propose the following framework for understanding Valentinian ritual behavior by asking these questions: (1) how can it be said that a given sacrament is “aeonically-focused”? That is, what is the meaning of the ritual *in light of the future reunion with God*; and (2) how does the Spirit operate in the ritual such that it is sanctified despite its material components? I will argue that the Holy Spirit is the linchpin of the explanation for why we see rituals in the *Gospel of Philip*. The Holy Spirit is the aspect of God that sanctifies bodies, acts and objects, and redeems people despite their present condition. In order to begin to grapple with these questions, we must appeal to the Valentinian myth of the creation of the world. Consider this passage (54:18-31), which deals with the creation of the material world by the lesser deities, so-called archons:

The rulers wanted to fool people, since they saw that people have a kinship with what is truly good. They took the names of the good and assigned them to what is not good, to fool people with names and link the names to what is not good. So, as if they are doing people a favor, they take names from what is not good and transfer them to the good, in their own way of thinking. For they wished to take free people and enslave them forever.<sup>102</sup>

Because it is the creation of lesser beings who through their creation willingly deceive humans, one cannot trust the *gnosis* that one receives through images *except* that it is consecrated through a communion with the eternal God.

These acts of consecration are much more than mere ritual, as we have seen repeatedly, but in order that these physical rituals take on their spiritual – their actual – meaning, one must have an idea of how these sacraments fit into the wider context of Valentinian mythical protology: “The rulers thought they did all they did by their own power and will, but the Holy

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<sup>102</sup> Meyer, 162.



Spirit was secretly accomplishing all through them by the Spirit's will" (55:14-19).<sup>103</sup> Despite the archons' having created the world with falsehoods and disunities, means of deceiving humans, the Spirit is active in the world, even through these very archons who attempt to do harm. Those who partake of the sacraments are participating in – launching themselves into – the spiritual drama in which the world-creator archons are confounded by the Spirit, by the will of God, who acts in the world as a force for good, that humans might see their true divine origins.

Christians' knowledge of their role in this drama is crucial to their salvation. As we have seen, they must assimilate themselves to the spiritual Christ that they might escape the malevolent archons, who will attempt to snatch them on their way to be reunited in the highest aeon:

Whoever leaves the world can no longer be held back as if still in the world. Such a person clearly is beyond desire... and fear, is dominant..., and is above envy. If..., that person is grasped and choked. How can that person [hide from them]? Some [say], "We are faithful," in order that they [may escape unclean] spirits and demons. For if they had the Holy Spirit, no unclean spirit could grab them. Do not fear the flesh and do not love it. If you fear the flesh, it will dominate you. If you love the flesh, it will swallow you up and strangle you."<sup>104</sup>

Those who are unaware of their place within this mythological scheme are liable for capture and death at the hands of archons; they must receive the Holy Spirit in order to be saved, and this is achieved primarily, as Pagels notes, through *gnosis* conveyed through the sacraments, knowledge of themselves and God. It is through the *pneumatic* sacraments that one "hides" from the archons.

This assimilation into the resurrected Christ is the ultimate goal of the present existence. It is the source of the efficacy of the sacraments:

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<sup>103</sup> Meyer, 164.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 172.



A person is either in this world or in the resurrection – or in the middle place. May I not be found there! In this world there is good and evil, but the good of the world is not really good and the evil of the world is not really evil. After this world there is evil that is really evil: this is called the middle. The middle is death. As long as we are in this world, we should acquire resurrection, so that when we take off the flesh we may be found in rest and not wander in the middle. For many go astray on the way (66:7-21).

Our purpose is to be reunited with God and our angel in heaven and that which we do in this world must be done with this reunion in mind. Thus the seeds sown in this world will have the effect of preventing the archons from capturing our spirits on their ascent to heaven and facilitate our reunion. Ignorance of this tripartite division of reality into the aeon, the middle realm and the cosmic realm would mean an inability to do what is necessary to ensure salvation. Because of this, orthodox Christians must learn the truth; they must acquire *gnosis* in order to be saved, in order to avoid those archons which seek to destroy them.

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic person of the Trinity, the means by which God interacts with the world and gives spiritual meaning to the sacraments. “‘Father’ and ‘son’ are simple names, ‘holy spirit’ is a double name. They are everywhere, above and below, in the hidden and in the visible. The Holy Spirit is in the visible, and then it is below, and the Holy Spirit is in the hidden, and then it is above” (59:11-18).<sup>105</sup> The Holy Spirit can be found in the visible, that is, in humans and in the rituals of the Church (according to the practice and understanding of the Valentinians). It must be stated clearly that in contrast to popular modern stereotypes of gnosticism, the bridge between the present world and the spiritual world is entirely porous and at times blurred: there are instances in which *pneumatic* Christians may have experiences of the divine, perhaps through visions or through a communion with God through the bridal chamber sacrament. Likewise, the Holy Spirit acts in the world, redeeming it (or aspects of it) from its inherently fallen nature. Thus we use the word “dualism” to describe the outlook expressed by

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.





gnostic texts such as *Philip*, but we must also keep in mind that these are not two self-contained, mutually exclusive realms that cannot be transcended.

Einar Thomassen places the ritual aspects of *Philip* in a christological, rather than pneumatological context. He argues that the baptism of Christ establishes a paradigm in which baptizands participate in order that they might be saved. We have mentioned that in order to be saved, to avoid, for example, capture by archons in the middle realm, that one must assimilate oneself to Christ in order to take advantage of Christ's "invisibility" to the archons. The christological outlook of the text, according to Thomassen, goes much further than this in terms of conveying the idea that it is through Christ that the *pneumatic* Christian is saved. To begin this discussion, let us consider a passage that seems to bear out Thomassen's hypothesis, that is, that initiates participate in Christ's baptism through their own baptism, and that this is the means by which they are saved. "[It] was [necessary for Jesus]," we read in 72:29-73:1, "to go down into the water [in order to perfect] and purify it. [So also] those who are [baptized] in his name [are perfected]. For he said, '[Thus] shall we perfect all righteousness.'" <sup>106</sup> This is likely meant to convey that although the baptism is performed in water, in the current cosmic realm, the fact that Christ has purified the water has redeemed the act of baptism for Christians, causing it to have salvific effect.

Thomassen argues that the famous list that *Philip* gives of five sacraments, or mysteries, must be read in conjunction with the passage that follows it. He quotes 67:27-68:17, which Meyer translates: "The master did everything in a mystery: baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and bridal chamber. [For this reason] he said, 'I have come to make [the lower] like the [upper and the] outer like the [inner, and to unite] them in that place.' He spoke here in

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<sup>106</sup> Meyer, 177.



symbols [and images].”<sup>107</sup> When *Philip* writes that “the master did everything in a mystery,” argues Thomassen, he is referring to the “symbolic quality of his acts,” that is, Christ’s incarnation, baptism, crucifixion, etc.<sup>108</sup> These symbolic acts then bridge the gap between spiritual and earthly; the symbolic quality “empowers and transforms the things ‘below’ and ‘without,’ that is, the ritual acts, so as to make them equivalent to the things ‘above’ and ‘within,’ that is, the acts performed by the savior himself.”<sup>109</sup> Thus without the symbolic acts of Christ as a paradigm for the ritual acts, the rituals are merely actions without spiritual meaning. They are not salvific; they are merely the manipulation of material things.

Thomassen elaborates on what he considers to be the connection between the acts of Christ (particularly his baptism in the Jordan) and the baptism of Valentinian Christian initiates:

“while the initiation ritual is a symbolic reenactment of the redemptive acts performed by the Saviour, it is not simply identical with those acts, but is described as “images” (67:9-35), through which it is possible to share in the redemption offered by the paradigm of the Saviour under the *conditions of this world* [emphasis mine]. While the ritual provides an assimilation to the Savior by virtue of its symbolic significance, as a tangible image it is nevertheless hierarchically subordinate to the authenticity of the model itself.”<sup>110</sup>

By conferring on the ritual acts that comprise the initiation process – submerging in water, anointing, Eucharist celebration, etc. – meaning according to their association with the life of Christ, those who engage in the ritual action are able to participate in those acts of Christ, to be saved by virtue of them. The ritual acts of Christians are merely “images” of the original and are subject to the limitations of this world, but they are necessary for salvation.

In this way, the Valentinian community that produced the *Gospel of Philip* has solidified – or attempted to solidify – its affinity with orthodox Christians, insofar as orthodox Christians

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<sup>107</sup> Meyer, 173.

<sup>108</sup> Thomassen, 95.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



and those Christians who follow Valentinian philosophy both exegete Scripture. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, is used repeatedly in 67:30-68:17 and the author of *Philip* is occasionally in dialogue with Paul, if only to refute his claim that we are baptized into Christ's death (77:7-15). This is likely the result of the fact that Valentinians are not, according to outward appearances, necessarily a separate group of Christians distinct from the orthodox, at least in terms of their ritual practices and in terms of what they accept as inspired Scripture. The difference, it would seem, is in the interpretation of rituals in terms of their context within a cosmological/protological framework. Those with Valentinian tendencies would have understood orthodox baptism and other rituals to be lacking a major salvific component even though they agreed that Christ was the focus of ritual practice.

I would argue, however, that it is not merely a matter of choosing a christological versus a pneumatological paradigm in order to make sense of the existence of Valentinian ritual. There is a sense in which the answer to this question draws on both pneumatological and christological concepts. In one passage in *Philip*, the author deals with both baptism and Eucharist, and makes use of both christological and pneumatological ideas:

The cup of prayer contains wine and water, for it represents the blood for which thanksgiving is offered. It is full of the Holy Spirit, and it belongs to the completely perfect human. When we drink it, we take to ourselves the perfect human. The living water is a body, and we must put on the living human. Thus, when one is about to go down into the water, one strips in order to put on the living human (75:14-25).<sup>111</sup>

Given that the "perfect human" is Christ, the blood of the Eucharist allows those who participate in the ritual to take on Christ, just as they take on Christ during the baptism. Likewise, the blood is filled with the Holy Spirit. The passage makes use of the practice of nude baptism – the

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<sup>111</sup> Meyer, 179.





initiate takes off his or her baptismal robe – in order to invoke the imagery of taking on a new spiritual body characterized by a union with Christ's body.

“As Jesus perfected the water of baptism, he poured death out. For this reason we go down into the water but not into death, that we may not be poured out into the spirit of the world. When it blows, winter comes. When the Holy Spirit blows, summer comes” (77:7-15).<sup>112</sup> Thus not only does the Holy Spirit sanctify the ritual, it also places these rituals within a decidedly eschatological, “aeonic” frame. The summer, as we have seen, represents the heavenly realm, the point at which the *pneumatic* Christian is reunited with her angel and with God. The *pneuma*, the breath, of the world, brings about death. The Holy Spirit, however, ushers in this reunion with God and thus the invocation of Spirit language places the ritual in an eschatological timeline with this reunion as its climax.

#### Conclusion: Thinking Theoretically About Ritual and Anti-Cosmic Dualism

This paper has attempted to explain how ritual acts can exist in the *Gospel of Philip*, a text that constitutes a component of a gnostic theological discourse in which created material being is evil. As noted earlier, Kurt Rudolph has argued that because of their general anti-cosmic attitude, gnostic texts are fundamentally opposed to a liturgical theology in which physical rituals are said to be salvific. Rudolph admits that liturgical language is found in various gnostic texts, but this is merely, he argues, a practice which reinforces the *pneumatic* Christian's status as a spirit destined for reunion with the transcendent God.<sup>113</sup> To the extent that ritual exists in these texts, therefore, it does not actually perform salvific work and thus there is no inherent tension which one would expect to arise: how can the phenomenal world and its

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>113</sup> Rudolph, 218.





objects save humans if it is inherently evil? And yet as we have seen in *Philip*, both in looking at Pagels' and DeConick's analyses and in studying the points at which the divine and cosmic realms intersect by virtue of the Spirit, we have seen that these rituals are in fact salvific. This is all despite the fact that the *Gospel of Philip* does evince an anti-cosmic dualism that Rudolph seems to argue is the cause of liturgical frameworks in which rituals are not salvific. We have resolved this issue by arguing that although the material world came about as a result of a mistaken creation by a lesser deity, there are discrete points of sanctifications, loci of the intersection between the human and the divine, and thus there is the potential for salvation through material acts and objects. This requires, as we have seen, the invocation and presence of the Spirit of God, who descends and sanctifies people, acts and objects.

I would like to propose a reversal of the commonly-held assumption – one that I shared and that prompted the writing of this paper – that anti-cosmic dualism should lead to anti-ritualism, or a diminished theological status for ritual. On the contrary, I would like to suggest that in some cases, the opposite might be true: the evil, fallen nature of the created world *enhances*, rather than diminishes, the need for physical ritual. In this argument, I would like to draw on the work of noted ritual scholar and theorist Catherine Bell, who gives insight as to what it means when we say that an object, action or person is considered to be “sacred.” Instead of recognizing the inherent sanctity of an object, the ritual in fact *creates* the sacred object; phenomenologically, ritual sets aside certain objects for sacrality: “While ritual-like action is thought to be that type of action that best *responds* to the sacred nature of things, in actuality, ritual-like action effectively *creates* the sacred by explicitly differentiating such a realm from a profane one.”<sup>114</sup> Thus analyzed from a more broadly theoretical standpoint, we can argue that in

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<sup>114</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 156-157.



fact the ritual process reifies the dualism inherent in gnostic theology, recognizing the differentiation between earthly and divine and casting off some objects, actions and people, making them sacred and contrasting them with the larger, sinful and fallen world around them. This helps to explain the fact that there are certain discrete loci of the intersection of earthly and divine. The ritual act creates these loci; they are points of transition from “profane” to sacred.

In fact, it could be that the ritual actions, be they baptism, Eucharist, anointing and so on, are in fact a way of mapping abstract mythical dualism onto the earthly plane. From what we have just argued, it follows that through the ritual acts, participants are able to see, hear, touch and taste the sacred and we have seen that they and the objects are deified by these acts and objects. Thus through the ritual, the participant is able to perceive through the senses the dualism that the theology teaches: the material world is fallen, but these acts represent the working of the Spirit, who sanctifies certain objects and actions thus contrasting them with the “profane” and unsanctified. This assertion becomes more pointed when one considers Bell’s analysis of rites of initiation, such as the baptism found in the *Gospel of Philip*. “Indeed,” she writes,

life-cycle rituals seem to proclaim that the biological order is less determinative than the social. Physical birth is one thing; being properly identified and accepted as a member of the social group is another... Some scholars have theorized that there is a deep human impulse to take the raw changes of the natural world and ‘cook’ them, in the words of Levi-Strauss, thereby transforming physical inevitabilities into cultural regularities.<sup>115</sup>

I would like to argue that in a discursive frame in which the physical world is thought to be evil and fallen, there would be a heightened need for rituals that sanctified some aspects of that world, so as to regulate and “tame,” so to speak, the objects and events surrounding them.

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<sup>115</sup> Bell, 94.



Liturgy is a way of establishing God's presence in the world, something much more important if one is surrounded by what one considers to be evil.

“This impulse,” Bell continues, “may be an attempt to exert some control over nature or to naturalize the cultural order by making physical events into elements of an embracing conceptual order of recognition and experience.”<sup>116</sup> We have argued that by virtue of rituals, Valentinian initiates become participants in the heavenly-cosmic drama and that rituals are a primary means by which the Spirit acts in the world. There is a sense in which rituals also afford Valentinians some control over a world that is created and ruled by archons, reassuring their participants of the presence of the Spirit despite the evil of the world. Thus it may be that rituals were ever more important to Valentinians because of this theology. What is at stake in this, more broadly, involves issues of embodiment, suffering, even ecology.

This paper has sought to add nuance to the caricature of gnosticism as promoting a dualism that pictures the material world and the heavenly world to be impenetrably cut off from one another. We have seen that despite anti-cosmic dualism, there are points of intersection. Further research, then, might analyze gnostic texts, such as the *Gospel of Philip*, for their understanding of bodily suffering or the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. Far from denying the body and instituting a form of radical asceticism, Valentinians represented by this text affirm the effectiveness of objects, bodies and actions in salvation. Therefore future scholarship must take into account the possibility that material/spiritual dualisms do not necessarily promote a worldview in which the material world is entirely without instances of sanctification. I would be interested in pursuing an interest in the eschatological language in various gnostic texts, perhaps researching gnostic texts whose eschatological frame of reference

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<sup>116</sup> Bell, 94.





can be determined, and working toward a model for how that eschatology affects the text's understanding of the meaning and value of the present world.



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